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FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
TO RHMFIU/NAVHLTHRSCHCEN SAN DIEGO CA
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUZDUNZ/FOB-J CAMP ZAMA JA
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHOR/USODC GABORONE BC
RUEHSB/USDAO HARARE ZI
RUEHSB/AMEMBASSY HARARE 1412

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000633

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: MASS MARR PREL OTRA MI

SUBJECT: Country Clearance granted

REF: 082228Z AUG 07

¶1. American Embassy Lilongwe grants country clearance and welcomes the visit of Cynthia Simon-Arndt to Malawi, 21-26 August to provide assistance with the COP preparation to the HCT. Control Officer for the visit will be the Political Officer John Letvin, office telephone number 265-1-773-166, ext. 3463;

¶2. Accommodations

Not requested

¶3. Airport Departure Tax

Regardless of diplomatic or other official status, all departing air travelers are subject to an airport departure tax of thirty U.S. dollars (\$30), which must be paid in U.S. dollars. Today's exchange rate is USD 1.00 to 133.35 Malawi Kwacha.

¶4. Foreign Exchange

Banking services are very limited throughout Malawi and there are no ATM machines. Further, the country is experiencing a shortage of hard currency and it is particularly difficult to obtain U.S. dollars even via accommodation exchanges with the embassy cashier.

Whereas the Embassy Cashier will cash travelers checks, usually for Malawi Kwacha only at the current exchange rate posted by RAMC-Paris, the local money changers normally charge a 10% fee. For all of these reasons, travelers are advised to consider bringing a small, whatever is reasonable amount of U.S. dollars if they are planning any personal in-country travel.

¶5. Airport Transfer

All visitors should check in with their host agency executive office at their earliest opportunity.

¶6. Cellular Telephones

Cellular telephones are available for rent at the airport for travelers requiring such capability. The cost is approximately \$2.50 per day plus a refundable deposit of \$200. Calling cards may be purchased in denominations of \$1, \$2, \$5, \$10, \$20, and \$50.

¶7. Climate

Malawi's climate is generally subtropical. There is little to no rainfall throughout most of the country from May to October. It is hot and humid from October to April along the lake and in the Lower Shire Valley. Lilongwe is also hot and humid during these months, albeit far less than in the south. The rest of the country is warm during those months. From June through August, the lake areas and far south are comfortably warm, but the rest of Malawi can be chilly at night,

with temperatures ranging from 50-140C or 410-570F.

¶18. What to wear

Visitors are particularly requested to observe local dress customs, which strongly emphasized modesty under the former president. While attitudes and customs have changed so that women wearing trousers and women and men wearing shorts is acceptable in urban and tourist areas, in outlying villages it is still inappropriate for women to appear without wearing a skirt or long dress. This can be easily accomplished by tying a wrap around the waist to cover shorts, trousers, or short skirts. The wraps, called chitenjes or khangas, are inexpensive, readily available in local markets, and, as a bonus, are usually quite beautiful. In sum, Malawians are very conventional and conservative people and our display of obvious respect for their customs and traditions goes a long way toward furthering our mutual relations, and this is particularly so in the rural areas.

¶19. Excess Baggage

Officials at Kamuzu International Airport can be very strict concerning excess baggage; and because fees for excess baggage are not posted, travelers run the risk of incurring excessive charges. Therefore, when appropriate for reasons of official business, post recommends that visitors have an excess baggage allowance added to their tickets at the time of purchase.

¶10. Flight Reconfirmation

Because flights from Lilongwe are frequently overbooked,

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travelers are encouraged to reconfirm onward travel.

¶11. Health

Travelers to Malawi should check with their agency's medical unit several weeks before arrival in Lilongwe to receive recommended immunizations and to begin malaria prophylaxis. Malaria is a significant health problem in Malawi. Swimmers should be aware of the risk of contracting schistosomiasis. Although tap water is treated in the major cities, quality varies and it is not always safe for drinking. Do not drink water outside of the cities; bottled water is readily available in stores and in restaurants. HIV/AIDS is prevalent in Malawi and visitors should exercise extreme caution at all times to avoid contact that might result in HIV/AIDS transmission.

A yellow fever vaccination received within the last ten years and evidenced with a World Health Organization International Certificate of Vaccinations may be required for entry into Malawi.

¶12. Security

During your visit to Malawi, you should use the same security precautions you would exercise in any urban area of the developing world. Carjacking and robberies occur throughout Malawi and all visitors should use caution. You should not carry personal valuables or large amounts of currency when visiting the downtown areas of Lilongwe or Blantyre. We recommend that you not venture out alone at night. Given the high rate of vehicular accidents, use of USG vehicles outside urban areas after dark is prohibited and the mission strongly discourages individuals from driving their private vehicles outside urban areas after dark.

¶13. Threat Assessment

Malawi is rated critical for crime. Porous borders,

easily acquired small arms, and an under-resourced police service provide an easy environment for criminals. Besides petty thefts, the majority of reported crimes are car-jackings and burglaries. Even though there are no known terrorist organizations operating in Malawi, the conditions noted above also allow for a possible, undetected terrorist presence. The current government was democratically elected in 1994, then re-elected in 1999 and 2004. Malawi currently enjoys political stability with few instances of civil unrest or public demonstrations.

¶14. Travel

Malawi is a long and narrow country, covering more than 1000 km from North to South. The geography is dominated by the tranquil waters of Lake Malawi, nearly 600km long and up to 80km wide, bordering the east of the country. It is the greatest attraction for visitors to this peaceful place well known for its friendly people, golden shores, and stunning natural scenery. Malawi also has eleven national parks and game reserves where everything from elephants to orchids are protected. The three national parks of Lengwe, Liwonde, and Lake Malawi National Park are located in the south; Kasungu National Park is in the central region; and Nyika National Park is in the north. Additionally, game reserves are accessible from all parts of the country.

¶15. Visas

U.S. citizens bearing diplomatic, official or tourist passports do not require visas when entering Malawi for business or vacation. For longer-term stays that require a residency visa, the embassy's Consular Section will assist you.

**¶16. TAKULANDIRANI or MWALANDILIDWA! Welcome to Malawi,
the warm heart of Africa.**

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